

Peshigo River State Forest 2005 Annual Report

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Winter 2006

2005 in Review

2005 was a historic year on the Peshigo River State Forest, one of many to come. The land transfer from Wisconsin Public Service (WPS) to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was complete at the end of 2004. WPS hosted a Land Dedication Ceremony on December 21, 2004 at Camp Bird where Gov. Jim Doyle accepted the land deed for the state forest from WPS representatives. Many local, county and state officials were present to witness the event.

In the winter months of 2005, state forest staff were busy working on forest and land management issues, doing law enforcement patrols on the state forest, and preparing work for the spring and summer. The state forest hosted 2 candlelight skis at the Spring Rapids Trailhead, both events had a good turnout. The state forest will continue to offer this event, watch your local paper for announcements or call the forest office for times and locations.

Spring brings one of the busiest times for state forest staff. As the weather gets nicer, staff spend much time preparing the boat landings and other day use areas for use. In May, the state forest held its first Annual Meeting at the Stephenson Town Hall. This meeting is for stakeholders and other concerned citizens to hear from DNR staff about the past year on the state forest. The state forest will have annual meetings every year (check out the back page for the next meeting). In addition to the annual meeting, the PRSF will do an annual report much like this one in the coming years.

The summer months of 2005 kept staff very busy with continued work on forest and land management issues, law enforcement and maintenance duties. With the warm, dry weather we had, thousands of visitors used the property weekly.

The end of 2005 was busy because of the High Falls Drawdown. The nice fall weather also brought thousands of visitors to the area. It was a good chance for staff to have contacts with the public about the geology and history of the flowage. The hunting season was a successful and safe one this year on the state forest.

Overall, our "first year" was a very good year for the PRSF, and we plan to build on our successes in 2006. We hope you like our first annual report. Inside are more detailed reports on other aspects of the state forest. The forest is committed to integrated management and public involvement. Please share with us your thoughts and concerns about the contents of this document.



Johnson Falls Flowage in early morning

Meet the State Forest Staff

Dan Mertz is the Forest Manager of the Peshigo River State Forest. Dan began working on the state forest in October 2002. Prior to the PRSF, Dan worked at the Wausaukee DNR Station as a private land forester for 22 years. Dan directly manages the forest management and land acquisition programs, as well as overseeing all aspects of the state forest.

Sara Pearson is the Ranger / Assistant

Property Manager of the state forest. Sara was the first employee on the state forest, starting here on July 15th, 2002. Sara has previously worked at Mirror Lake State Park and in the Madison DNR office. Sara oversees the law enforcement, maintenance, and recreation programs on the state forest.

In addition, numerous seasonal staff have worked on the state forest doing maintenance duties, law enforcement and forest management.

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Interesting facts about the PRSF:

- Wisconsin's newest state forest since Gov. Knowles State Forest was established in 1970.
- The PRSF is the smallest state forest, just over 12,000 acres. The Northern Highland—American Legion is Wisconsin's largest state forest, at over 223,000 acres!
- The PRSF is in 4 townships: the Towns of Stephenson, Silver Cliff and Porterfield in Marinette County, and Lakewood Township in Oconto County.
- The PRSF has over 70 miles of water frontage, including close to 6 miles of free flowing river.

Facilities Maintenance

By Sara Pearson

In 2005, you probably saw some pretty notable changes in maintenance on the state forest. The 16 boat landings on the state forest takes up the majority of our maintenance time. In early spring, we begin cutting trees that we find to be "hazardous"- these are dead or dying trees, trees with wounds, weak trunks, etc...These are cut and then sold as firewood, and the stumps are ground down. In 2004 and 2005, numerous trees were cut at boat landings, and this spring, we planted many new trees at the various landings to replace the ones we had to cut. This is an ongoing process that we will do every year, although hopefully we won't have to cut as many as we did the past 2 springs. During the boating season, the maintenance crew is busy weekly at the boat landings mowing, picking up litter, and various other tasks to keep the landings looking their best.

Other improvements at the boat landings you may have noticed is the rerouting of traffic at Boat Landing #7, and the improvements made to all of the boat launches on High Falls

Flowage, and at #14 on Johnson Falls Flowage. During the drawdown, there was some heavy rain that caused complete washouts of all the boat landings. We were able to fix the boat landings in late fall. Some touch up work may be required in the spring once the snow melts and the water comes back, but we think when the boating season begins in 2006, you will find a vast improvement to those landings.

Other maintenance work we do is trail maintenance on our skiing / hiking trail system. Again, many hazardous trees are cut to avoid damage to the trails and users. Some stump grinding was done on the trails as well. The state forest has 10 canoe campsites along the Peshtigo River and Johnson Falls Flowage to maintain, which includes mowing, hazard tree removal, and general cleaning of the sites. More work is planned for these sites in 2006. The state forest has 3 angler access roads to maintain, which includes tree removal and road grading. Major improvements will be made to the Medicine Brook and Seymour Rapids Roads in 2006. Each of these roads has had gates installed so during spring thaw we can shut these roads off to vehicular traffic to protect the integrity of the road.

Law Enforcement Update

By Ranger Sara Pearson

2005 kept the state forest law enforcement team busy all year round. At the start of the year, we worked on snowmobile patrol on the state forest and ice fishing regulations. A concentrated effort was made to ensure that all ice shanties are properly labeled with the owner's name and address, and that shanties are taken off the ice by March 15th. The spring and summer season kept us busy with boat patrol on the flowages, enforcing fishing and boating regulations. Illegal ATV use on the state forest is the # 1 violation, with numerous individuals being cited. For the most part, all ATV use is prohibited on the state forest. The fall and late winter season kept us busy with the flowage drawdown as well hunting enforcement, with numerous citations for illegal bait violations and deer blind/stand violations. Please call with any questions on regulations in the state forest.



Ranger Sara Pearson and the 2005 Crivitz 3rd Graders

Drawdown Summary

In September 2005, WPS began a drawdown of Johnson Falls and High Falls to do scheduled maintenance repairs of the dams and dikes. Within days, both flowages began taking on a spectacular appearance. As the water receded, visitors were able to hike on the exposed bed and explore parts of the flowage by foot that they might get to do only once in a lifetime. The fishing season on both flowages was cut short, however many anglers were able to fish from shore and use portable watercraft to fish. As mentioned in the "Facilities Maintenance" article, during the drawdown the landings on both flowages experience heavy washouts. As the water receded, it left the landing shore unsupported and susceptible to washout in heavy rains. The Marinette County Hwy. Dept. was hired to do the work and we are very pleased with the end result.

Our most frequently asked question during the drawdown was: What about the fish? As the water receded, WPS and DNR fish crews were out rescuing stranded fish to put them back into the main river channel. They found that they had to rescue very few fish- most had already made their way into the main channel. In other drawdowns, the fish population had not been adversely affected as a result of the drawdown. However, DNR biologists did surveys before the drawdown and will do them after the water returns to monitor the situation. Another question we were asked frequently is if we were going to cut the stumps that were sticking up. During a previous drawdown, WPS cut down all the hazardous stumps. Also factor in that 13 feet of water will be on top of those stumps, so you really shouldn't have a problem.

WPS completed its work early and Johnson Falls was refilled. High Falls will be back to normal levels in the spring of 2006.

Forest Management Update

By Dan Mertz

In accordance with WI Statute 28.04, state forests are managed for a variety of recreational opportunities, timber management and harvests, aesthetics, watershed protection and habitat for a variety of plant and animal species. The ultimate goal of this



management is to benefit the people of Wisconsin, and those who will follow. To meet these goals, 2 seasonal forestry technicians have been hired to assist Dan with some initial start up work. In the summer of 2005, Steve Kaufman was hired to do mapping of the forest which will assist staff in future planning of the state forest. In November of 2005, Katie McMahan was hired as a forestry technician and has been working with Dan to

update reconnaissance information (determining timber types in the PRSF and where they're located), set up timber sales on the state forest, and other general forest management activities. State forests are required to practice sustainable forestry, which includes harvesting timber in a timely manner. Thousands of acres of over mature aspen and scrub oak need harvesting because

they have exceeded the ideal harvest ages of about 50 years for aspen and about 60 years for scrub oak. This is serious because oak is an important wildlife species that is replaced by red maple and brush as it dies. If the oak is harvested before it becomes sickly, then it can be regenerated to more oak. The best way to regenerate scrub oak is by clear cutting it, which means all trees are cut in the harvest area. These old stands of scrub oak cannot be thinned because thinning shocks the trees which are left standing and they die. Visitors to the state forest in the next 5 to 10 years should expect to see timber harvests in many parts of the property.

A boost to the forestry program came in 2005 when all WI State Forests, County and private forests under the Managed Forest Law were found to be "Certified. Certified forests means management of the state's forests meet strict standards for ecological, social and economic sustainability. Building contractors and other manufacturers are expanding use of certified wood to assure consumers that their products are not tainted by timber theft or destructive timber cutting issues that plague some parts of the world. Forest certification helps Wisconsin remain competitive in global markets that increasingly demand certified raw materials.

Land Acquisition

The state forest is continually looking for ways to expand its boundaries in ways that would benefit the public and natural resources. For example, benefits of expanding the forest boundary might be ecological by linking large tracts of public land—the state forest, county forest, and the national forests. There could be hydrological benefits as well to protect the Peshtigo River, a main reason of the establishment of the PRSF.

All property pur-

When the DNR acquires land for public use, the DNR makes payments for property taxes at the same level as any other property owner.

chases are on a willing seller basis. As required by state and federal laws, the Department pays "just compensation" for property, which is the estimated market value based on an appraisal by a certified licensed appraiser. At times, it is in the interest of the DNR and the landowner for the Department to acquire only part of the rights to a property, an easement. Landowners within the state forest boundary may be periodically contacted by Department staff to explain the land acquisition program and to see if they have an interest in selling their property. Acquisition is always based on the landowner's willingness to sell or donate their property.

If you are a landowner that has land bordering the state forest, please consider selling to the state. Contact Dan Mertz for more information.

What's happening at Gov. Thompson State Park?

By Maggie Kailhofer, Park Manager

The Governor Thompson State Park opened to the public last November and since that time we have seen an influx of visitors out hiking, canoeing, snowshoeing, skiing, sledding, and ice fishing. The park also held its second annual 9-day deer gun season this past fall, and with ample antlerless tags available most hunters did not go home empty handed. Currently, the park is open 6am-8pm daily. There is no overnight camping permitted at this time. Use of motorized vehicles, horses,



and pedal bikes are prohibited. Visitors to the park will need to purchase either a daily or annual admission sticker at the park entrance. At this time, there are no fees to use Boat Landing 13, on Caldron Falls Flowage. The park has many plans for future development including new roads, trail systems, picnic areas, group and family campgrounds. Every year visitors will see the park continue to change and become more of a recreational partner to the state forest. Make plans to explore and enjoy your new state park. To contact the park, please call 715-757-3979.

Wisconsin DNR

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Peshtigo River State Forest Annual Meeting

◇ March 22, 2006 at 7:00 p.m.

◇ Stephenson Town Hall,
County Road X, Crivitz WI

◇ Meet the state forest staff,
ask questions, and learn
more about what happened
on the state forest in 2005,
and what is planned for
2006.

**Check us out on
the web!**

dnr.wi.gov



Master Planning Update

By Dan Mertz

Master planning for the Peshtigo River State Forest was resumed in earnest in the summer of 2005 once the transfer of ownership from WPS was complete at the end of 2004. All DNR properties (state parks, state forests, wildlife areas) have a "Master Plan." These plans establish goals and objectives for the property and identify how the property will be managed and developed. The plans are designed to clearly communicate to the public how the property will look and what benefits it will provide. For the planning process to be effective, people who are affected by or interested in the future of the PRSF must get involved.

The master plan is scheduled to be completed in 2007 and will compliment the master plan for the Governor Thompson State Park, which was completed in 2004. Presently, many individuals with specialized knowledge are working on the plan and using

as a template the plan which was developed for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest last year. Represented on the various master planning teams are DNR staff from Marinette County, Green Bay, and Madison, who are knowledgeable in forestry, recreation, wildlife, fisheries, endangered



A snowmobile trail in the PRSF

resources, landscape architecture, and real estate. Most of the information needed to prepare a comprehensive plan has been collected over the past 3 years and has been put into reports and maps so that the planners can best decide how to manage the forest, care for endangered resources,

and provide the type of recreation that the public needs and the land is capable of providing. There will be a public meeting in 2006 and the preferred alternatives for managing the forest will be presented.

For more information on the PRSF master plan, please contact the forest office.